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MISS O' NEILL.

London, Pub.d as the Act directs June 1 1818 by Daniel Cox High St. Southwark

MEMOIRS

OF

MISS O'NEILL;

CONTAINING

HER PUBLIC CHARACTER, PRIVATE LIFE,

AND

Dramatic Progress,

FROM HER ENTRANCE UPON THE STAGE;

WITH

A FULL CRITICISM

OF HER DIFFERENT CHARACTERS,

APPROPRIATE SELECTIONS FROM THEM,

AND SOME

ACCOUNT OF THE PLAYS SHE HAS PREFERRED FOR HER REPRESENTATIONS.

By CHARLES INIGO JONES, Esq.
OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE.

EMBELLISHED WITH A STRIKING AND HIGHLY-FINISHED

Portrait of Miss O'Neill.

London:
PRINTED FOR D. COX, HIGH-STREET, BOROUGH.
1816.

BARNARD AND FARLEY,
Skinner-Street, London.

TO

THOMAS HARRIS, ESQ.

SIR,

As it is to your liberal patronage and nice discrimination the subject of the present volume, as well as many others, has owed her first introduction to the London stage, permit me to address to you the following Memoirs, as a just tribute of respect to your character, and which the present Heroine of the Drama I am persuaded will be the first to approve. Next to acting well, the being able to

form a just estimate of merit in others is the most desirable quality attached to the situation of a Manager, and when to this correct judgment you display, is added a liberal and humane disposition towards those placed under your protection, the British Drama cannot fail, under your auspices, to attain its highest perfection.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

LONDON, MARCH, 1816.

Introduction.

DRAMATIC representations are certainly the most rational of all entertainments. They give equal satisfaction to the eye and the mind. Hence they have been eagerly encouraged, in proportion as civilization has advanced in every country, and they afford at all times, to a discerning observer, the best picture of the morals and manners of a people.

The interest which Dramatic representations create, is naturally transferred to those through whose agency, improvement, entertainment, and pleasure, are thus conferred, and the merit of the Actor no less the subject of our attention and approbation,

than of the Poet, who has originally supplied him with the means of furnishing us with this rational and intellectual feast. The History of the Stage then, has, at every period, met a host of admirers. The lives of the individuals who have shone on it, and in some degree have regulated public taste and sentiment, have been brought forward with a laudable desire to trace their progress, and learn the gradual steps which advanced them to perfection; and accordingly, in doing this, their virtues and vices have been alternately a theme for applause or censure.

Such being the case, the account of an Actress, who at present so universally merits public regard, and who captivates equally by her dramatic powers, as by the blameless conduct of her private life, cannot fail to have a claim to strong prepossession with every person to whom female excellence is a subject of deserved admiration.

Memoirs

OF

MISS O'NEILL,

&c. &c.

MISS O'NEILL, the subject of the present Memoir, is the eldest daughter of John O'Neill, Esq. a gentleman descended from the well known family of that name in Ireland. Her mother is the daughter of Mr. Featherstone, of the county of Longford, the representative of a family, antient and respectable.

Mr. O'Neill, her father, early devoted himself with that enthusiasm, which is too often felt to actuate young minds fond of dramatic representations, to the profession of the stage, contrary, perhaps, to the wishes and prudent advice of his friends; a

profession he has continued to pursue, with all that varied fortune which is, for the most part, the attendant of those who enter on this scene of life. Miss O'Neill, therefore, may be said to have been born on the boards, and in the language of the poet, "to have lisped in numbers ere the numbers came." Thus she possesses by inheritance a dramatic taste. Mr. O'Neill, though not highly distinguished as an actor himself, except in some characters, is allowed not to want abilities as a critic on his brethren, and to know well the business and public feeling in regard to scenic effect. Under his tuition his daughter first imbibed her ideas, and received her lessons in the mimic art. Besides Miss O'Neil, Mr. O'Neill is the father of a numerous family. Her eldest brother, Mr. John O'Neill, has been bred in the same school, and though he has not appeared before a London audience, is considered, in the provincial theatres, as making a respectable appearance in a variety of characters. Her second brother is at present studying medicine, under the auspices of Mr. Wilson, of Windmill-street, the celebrated anatomist, and is the close adviser and attendant of his sister in her public concerns, a

proof equally of his judgment and fraternal affection. Her third brother has lately entered upon a military life as an officer in a marching regiment, the generosity of his sister having enabled him to obtain the professional object of his wishes. The rest of the family are yet too young to appear on the stage of life. Thus situated, with the incumbrance of a numerous offspring, it is not to be supposed that Miss O'Neill's education could be conducted by her father, with an attention to all those accomplishments in her first years, which the children of wealth and indulgence are so sure to receive, and which, though received, are too often forgot or disregarded. Miss O'Neill would accordingly owe much to native intuition, and perhaps may be properly said, in some respects, to have been *self-taught,* and to owe to the powers of her own superior mind that elegance and cultivated understanding, which has fitted her for conceiving and entering into the feelings of those great characters which form her peculiar walk.

Mr. O'Neill, like most actors who are not stationary in the London theatres, was obliged to change, according to circumstances, from place to

place, and Belfast, Drogheda, and the other provincial towns of the sister kingdom, were the occasional seats of his dramatic representations, and first gave display to his daughter's talents. At the early age of twelve years, Miss O'Neill made her debut on the Drogheda stage, of which her father was then acting manager; and so favourable was her appearance on that and after occasions, as soon to give presage of her future perfection. It may be justly said perhaps, that an actor, like a poet, is born not educated. The fine conception that embodies thought, and the exquisite feeling that gives effect to situations and circumstances are certainly the gift of nature. A Shakspeare could not personate the superior portraits his pen delineated, nor a Garrick use the pencil of a Shakspeare, though he gave such brilliant and striking effect to his characters. Nature, therefore, bestows a peculiar cast on every mind, and education only ripens what her hand has originally planted. Hence, though such talents may be improved, the foundation of them must be innate, and like the varying temper and the features of the face, exist only in a certain appropriate organization.

The eclat of Miss O'Neill's early dawn soon spread beyond the Drogheda theatre, and Mr. Talbot, manager of the Belfast company, immediately tendered offers to secure the advantage of her rising abilities. She was accordingly taken from under her father's wing by this gentleman, and she continued to appear at Belfast with progressive approbation and regular improvement for a period of two years. It would appear from the account of her, even at that time, that her very first representations entitled her to a reputation which it was long before Mrs. Siddons acquired. Great as are the powers of this last actress, it is acknowledged she owed much to time and study, that she was literally broke in, and in the peculiar mode of acting she adopted, that there was much practice and labour necessary to give it the high finish it acquired in her hands.

At the end of two years on the Belfast stage, so much were Miss O'Neill's superior powers the general talk and admiration of the country, that they excited the curiosity and interest of the Dublin manager. Liberal offers were made to induce her to appear in the capital, a situation in which

she was to meet a more refined and varied audience than had hitherto witnessed her representations, and one more capable of appreciating her merit and rewarding it. Her debut in the Irish metropolis was equally auspicious to her fame as in the provincial theatres; and this first appearance, the crisis of her fate and the prelude to her present brilliant career, secured her at once the hearts of the audience, who were confirmed, that report had only spoken the truth of her merits. The character she selected on this occasion was that of *Widow Cheerly*, in the popular comedy of the *Soldier's Daughter*. At this period, and so long, it is observed, as she continued on the Dublin stage, Miss O'Neill's powers were equally divided betwixt the tragic and comic muse; and though it is impossible she can represent any character with inferior talent, yet whoever witnesses her in the tearful scene must allow, that there lies the magic of her art, that to raise the sigh rather than excite a smile is the proper walk for her talents. Of this she seems now perfectly aware, and thus shews the correct judgment she possesses of herself.

It has been reported, though falsely, that Miss

O'Neill's appearance at first on the Dublin stage, was to supply the place of Miss Walstein. This would be considering her indeed in a secondary light, but that season Miss Walstein herself was not employed, and Miss O'Neill was called to the Dublin stage on the recommendation of her own merits, and not as a matter of convenience, or as a substitute for any other actress. Whatever Miss Walstein's talents may be, they are entirely different from those which Miss O'Neill has displayed, and no comparison can be instituted between the two females. This, however, is not said to disparage the reputation of Miss Walstein, who, we believe, is a deserving performer, and merits approbation, so far as the extent of her powers go, which are certainly but limited when compared with Miss O'Neill.

Standing thus high on the Dublin theatre, Miss O'Neill's merits were soon wafted to the British metropolis. The retirement of Mrs. Siddons had made a chasm in the heroines of the stage. Ineffectual attempts had been made to supply her place by second rate characters, who strutted for a few nights and then were heard of no more. But the

big impassioned tone, the real swell of woe, and the burst of indignation that distinguished this heavenly actress, were lost to the disappointed audience. In this state of things the manager of Covent Garden, ever alive to the interest of his trust saw it necessary to secure the talents of Miss O'Neill as a successor to the distinguished heroine who had retired, and to supply to the London audience that dramatic feast they had so long been accustomed to enjoy from her transcendant powers. Such offers were accordingly tendered her as were equally flattering to her abilities as beneficial to her interest, and she left the Dublin theatre richer in reputation than in fortune, to reach the present climax of her fame, in the admiration and generosity of a London audience.

It may be proper on this interesting occasion, to give some account of the person and general appearance of the female who had such powers of attraction, and who, though accustomed so long to tread the stage, could not fail to experience on so momentous an event, all the natural timidity so congenial to a delicate and feeling mind—such, as it is acknowledged, Miss O'Neill possesses.

The night fixed for her first representation, as might be looked for, produced a more than overflowing house, and shewed the utmost height of public expectation, which was alive to criticize her merits, and to weigh them in the scale with a Yates, a Crawford, and a Siddons, the heroines they had formerly been accustomed to admire. The figure Miss O'Neill presented was highly prepossessing. Her height is above the middle size, her countenance full of intelligence and sensibility, and her general comportment displaying that modesty and diffident feeling, so proper for her embarrassing situation on so trying an occasion. Indeed, it may be remarked here, as a national trait of character, that the Irish females are distinguished by an excess of sensibility, not so conspicuous or so strongly marked in the other parts of the kingdom. This is highly to their credit, and it fits them for displaying to advantage every active energy of the soul.

JULIET.

In selecting a character for her first appearance, Miss O'Neill shewed much judgment in

having recourse to one of the productions of our immortal Bard, and the character of Juliet in Shakspeare's well-known Tragedy of *Romeo* and *Juliet*, was admirably fitted to her age, her powers, and that sensibility which is so predominant even with every female at this period of life. This tragedy, though not the first from Shakspeare's pen, possesses high interest, and a most affecting denouement of the plot. It is also, in many of its passages, more in the mouths of every one, than almost any other of Shakspeare's works; it contains much fancy, and many beautiful allusions. Nothing can be more admirably depicted than the description of Queen Mab. Nothing is more beautifully palliative of himself than Romeo's allusion to the rose, to shew that intrinsic merit is not to be weighed by the prejudice of a name, but by its own rare qualities.

"What is there in a name? That which we call a Rose, by any other name might smell as sweet."

In the representation of Juliet, Miss O'Neill appears in two distinct characters—1st, As the elegant and fascinating female;—and 2dly, As the

despairing and unfortunate wife. In the representation of this character, the great difficulty is to combine the ardent love and affection of the young and tender female, with the more sombre and deep seated grief of the unhappy wife. In this she eminently excels. Different from the modern Juliets who characterize the first part of the character, by a hoydenish wantonness, and the conclusion by a dronish whine, she has judiciously pointed out the path for future actresses to tread. In her first interview with Romeo, her answers are given in a manner peculiarly elegant and modest, which shews great art to render the scenes of ordinary life on the stage, free from the apparent art of the actor, or the supineness of affected ease. Her contemplation of Romeo in the banqueting scene, is no less masterly; her eye passes slightly over the rest of the company; when she sees him, she eagerly inquires who he is; her eyes become fixed, looking upon the spot where he stood. Her imagination follows him when he is no longer visible. She seems rivetted to the ground, and wholly absorbed in the idea of him who has left her. In vain the garrulous nurse interrupts her reverie; still fixed

to the pleasing spot, she remains till her loquacious attendant drags her away. Even then her eye is seen to look to the door through which he past, and she retires with a thunder of applause, verifying Romeo's description,

" O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright,
Her beauty hangs upon the cheek of night,
Like a rich jewel in an Æthiop's ear,
Beauty too rich for me, for earth too dear."

The balcony scene is rendered no less interesting, by the chaste simplicity, and ingenuous modesty which mark her acting. The refined sensibility she here displays, must be seen to be judged of; but whoever has heard her speak, as follows, will not easily forget it.

" Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face;
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak to-night.
Fain would I dwell on form; fain, fain deny
What I have spoke:—But farewell compliment!
Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say,—Ay;
And I will take thy word; yet, if thou swear'st,
Thou may'st prove false; at lovers' perjuries,
They say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,

If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully;
Or, if thou think'st I am too quickly won,
I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo: but else, not for the world.
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond;
And therefore thou may'st think my 'haviour light;
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou overheard'st, ere I was 'ware,
My true love's passion; therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night has so discovered."

In this scene our great dramatic writer has been censured, as shewing a forwardness in the sex which neither nature, nor Juliet's elevated rank justifies; but the performance of our Heroine amply contradicts this censure, and gives a pattern of honourable frankness, which we fear exists only on the stage.—The account of Tybalt's death, and Romeo's banishment, presents a picture of high-finished acting, if equalled, never exceeded. Her extreme grief at the supposition of her lover's death—her after reproaches of him for Tybalt's murder, and that, contrasted by her apologizing

tribute of affection, shew beautiful and high specimens of love and fidelity, which carry feminine fondness to a most exquisite height. Her mode of expressing that *one* word *banished,* is an electric shock which thrills every vein. The tenderness also displayed in the parting scene, is equally fine, and the sweet anxiety she gives to the words, " O thinkest thou we shall ever meet again?" leaves an impression on the mind not easily to be conceived. The last part of the play brings her powers particularly in competition with those of Mrs. Siddons, who, certainly, in pourtraying the sublime and terrific, has made that grand impression which renders her unrivalled in this department of the drama. To this may be added, that our Heroine labours under a physical disadvantage; for it cannot be supposed that the round and full face of youth, and feminine softness, can depict horror equal to the strong marked visage of age. Yet even here she triumphs in some degree over this defect of nature, and in the following fine soliloquy before she swallows the Friar's draught, she displays in the strongest colours the influence of the varying contending passions that distract her mind. The

conclusion on taking the drug, leaves an impression dreadfully awful on the audience, which requires some moments to shake off.

——— Heaven knows when we shall meet again.—
I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins,
That almost freezes up the heat of life:
I'll call them back again to comfort me.
Nurse!—What should she do here?
My dismal scene I needs must act alone.—
[*Takes out the phial.*
Come, phial.—
What if this mixture do not work at all?
Shall I of force be married to the count?
No, no;—this shall forbid it:—[*Draws a dagger.*]—Lie thou there.—
What, if it be a poison which the friar
Subtly hath minister'd, to have me dead;
Lest in this marriage he should be dishonour'd,
Because he married me before to Romeo?
I fear it is: and yet, methinks, it should not;
For he hath still been tried a holy man.—
How, if, when I am laid into the tomb,
I wake before the time that Romeo
Come to redeem me? there's a fearful point!
Shall I not then be stifled in the vault,
To whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in?

Or, if I live, is it not very like,
The horrible conceit of death and night,
Together with the terror of the place,—
As in a vault, an ancient receptacle,
Where, for these many hundred years, the bones
Of all my buried ancestors are pack'd;
Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,
Lies fest'ring in his shroud; where, as they say,
At some hours in the night spirits resort;—
Or, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,
Environed with all these hideous fears,
And madly play with my forefathers' joints?
And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud?
And in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone,
As with a club, dash out my desperate brains?—
O, look! methinks, I see my cousin's ghost
Seeking out Romeo:—Stay, Tybalt, stay!—
Romeo, I come: This do I drink to thee.—

[*Drinks the contents of the phial.*

O potent draught, thou hast chill'd me to the heart!—
My head turns round:— my senses fail me.—
O, Romeo! Romeo!—

[*She throws herself on the bed.*

The last act contains the climax of the whole, and we may remark, that the additions made by the modern patchers of the Drama, have here a

happier effect than the original, and affords the Heroine a fine opportunity of displaying some of the greatest traits of her genius. Her exquisite joy on waking from her trance, and finding Romeo beside her, succeeded by her poignant grief on learning he had swallowed poison: her efforts and expression as she assists him, while he becomes gradually affected by the operation of the baneful drug on his frame, and the increasing support she endeavours to lend him, till he sinks at last a lifeless corpse, are finely wound up in her closely clinging to the body, and falling with it to the ground, as if her delicate form were overpowered, by the weight which she was never tired of supporting. In this she shewed the finest possible conception, and produced the *ne plus ultra* of stage effect. So interesting is this part, that we cannot avoid presenting it to the reader.

Romeo. — Here lies Juliet. O, my love, my wife!
Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:
Thou art not conquer'd; beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips, and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there.

O, Juliet, why art thou yet so fair?
Here, here
Will I set up my everlasting rest;
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh.
Come, bitter conduct, come unsavoury guide!
[*Takes out the poison.*
Thou, desperate pilot, now at once run on
The dashing rocks my sea-sick weary bark!—
No more,—here's to my love!—
[*Drinks the draught.*
Eyes, look your last!
Arms take your last embrace? and, lips, do you
The doors of breath seal with a righteous kiss!—
[JULIET *wakes.*
Soft!—she breathes, and stirs.

Jul. Where am I? Defend me, powers!

Rom. She speaks, she lives, and we shall still be bless'd;
My kind propitious stars o'erpay me now
For all my sorrows past. Rise, rise, my Juliet;
And from this cave of death, this house of horror,
Quick let me snatch thee to thy Romeo's arms;
There breathe a vital spirit in thy lips,
And call thee back, my soul, to life and love.
[*Raises her.*

Jul. Bless me, how cold it is!—Who's there?

Rom. Thy husband;
'Tis thy Romeo, Juliet, raised from despair

To joys unutterable.—Quit, quit this place,
And let us fly together. [*Brings her from the tomb.*

Jul. Why do you force me so?—I'll ne'er consent;—
My strength may fail me, but my will's unmoved;
I'll not wed Paris;—Romeo is my husband.

Rom. Romeo is thy husband! I am that Romeo;
Nor all the opposing powers of earth or man
Shall break our bonds, or tear thee from my heart.

Jul. I know that voice;—its magic sweetness wakes
My tranced soul:—I now remember well
Each circumstance.
O my lord, my husband!—
Dost thou avoid me, Romeo?
You fright me:—Speak:—O, let me hear some voice
Besides my own, in this drear vault of death,
Or I shall faint.——Support me—

Rom. O, I cannot;
I have no strength; but want thy feeble aid.—
Cruel poison!

Jul. Poison! What means my lord? Thy trembling voice,
Pale lips, and swimming eyes,—Death's in thy face.

Rom. It is indeed; I struggle with him now;
The transports that I felt
To hear thee speak, and see thy opening eyes,
Stopp'd, for a moment, his impetuous course,
And all my mind was happiness and thee;
But now the poison rushes through my veins;—
I have not time to tell,—

Fate brought me to this place, to take a last,
Last farewell of my love, and with thee die.

Jul. Die?—Was the friar false?

Rom. I know not that.

I thought thee dead; distracted at the sight,—
O fatal speed!—drank poison,—kiss'd thy lips,
And found within thy arms a precious grave:—
But, in that moment,—O!—

Jul. And did I wake for this!

Rom. My powers are blasted:
'Twixt death and love I'am torn, I am distracted:
But death's strongest:—And must I leave thee, Juliet!
O, cruel, cursed fate! in sight of Heaven,—

Jul. Thou ravest; lean on my breast.

Rom. Fathers have flinty hearts, no tears can melt 'em:—
Nature pleads in vain; children must be wretched.

Jul. O, my breaking heart!

Rom. She is my wife,—our hearts are twined together,—
Capulet, forbear;—Paris, loose your hold;—
Pull not our heart-strings thus;—they crack,—they break,—
O, Juliet! Juliet!— [*Dies.*

The distraction that marks the concluding scene, is no less admirable, when to the Friar's attempts at consolation she replies,

"Patience!
Talk'st thou of patience to a wretch like me?"

The desponding and indignant expression of her countenance is sufficient without the words. Her resolution being wrought up to the highest pitch, she exclaims,

" Come thou not near me;
Or this dagger shall quit my Romeo's death."

Her wild attachment to the spot increases,

" Go, get thee hence; for I will not away."

She then looks franticly round, as if by chance, and discovers the phial,

" What's here? A phial!—Romeo's timeless end.—
O, churl! drink all; and leave no friendly drop
To help me after!—I will kiss thy lips;
Haply, some poison yet doth hang on them.—"

The last words are expressed with peculiar pathos and sensibility, and her eagerness to finish the catastrophe is inimitable,

" Then I'll be brief.—O, happy dagger!—
[*Stabs herself.*
This is thy sheath!—there rest,—and let me die.
[*Dies.*

Perhaps there is no character so difficult to personate as the lover, especially in the female. The acting of Miss O'Neill was so superior in Juliet, as from the first to electrify the audience. She possest over them, from what we have described, a magic charm throughout the whole representation, and every one left the theatre with the impression, that she was the very Juliet Shakspeare drew, that she *spoke, looked,* and *felt* the character. Her appearance on this night fixed her fame—its influence on the audience may be compared to the famous letter of Cæsar—*Veni—vidi—vinci.*—She came—she was seen—she vanquished.

BELVIDERA.

Miss O'Neill having thus so successfully sustained the ordeal of London criticism, from the tender and lovesick Juliet, past on to a character of still greater interest, the delineation of con-

jugal and filial affection in the person of Belvidera, as pourtrayed in Otway's Tragedy of *Venice Preserved.* This tragedy is the most finished of Otway's pieces, a man, great as a dramatic poet, but who literally died of want, while his productions have conferred plenty and happiness on others. The age in which he lived was insensible to his merit, though ample justice has been done him in the succeeding period, and the two master-pieces of his pen, *Venice Preserved,* and *The Orphan,* have continued standard representations, and will continue so, while nature and taste regulate the British stage. His *Venice Preserved* first appeared in 1685, when his talents as a writer were fully matured. It is written with much energy, with a powerful impression of nature, and an interesting concatenation of circumstances; and it possesses all that pathos in the language, and those attractive sentiments of the heroine, that render it one of the most affecting representations that grace the British stage. It is one also, that has shewn to advantage, the powers of most of the great actresses at successive periods, from the time of Mrs. Oldfield to our present Heroine.

Perhaps no play is better constructed for stage effect than this. The attention is kept alive throughout the whole, and there are few scenes but what are interesting. The incidents to work upon the resolution of Jaffier, and put into the mouth of Pierre, in the second scene, are admirably selected; when describing the ruin of his house and fortune, he tells him,

"The very bed, which, on thy wedding-night,
Received thee to the arms of Belvidera,
The scene of all thy joys, was violated
By the coarse hand of filthy dungeon villains,
And thrown among the common lumber."

The manner also in which Belvidera is first introduced, give a strong prepossession in favour of an actress like Miss O'Neill, where soft and tender thrill is so much suited to the situation, and a universal stillness and anxiety pervades every pulse of the house, when she is heard to repeat, behind the scenes,

"Lead me, lead me, my virgins,
To that kind voice.
My lord, my love, my refuge!"

The excess of feminine tenderness she throws into that passage in the same scene, is also exquisite, where she says,

> " Oh! I will love thee, even in madness love thee!
> Though my distracted senses should forsake me,
> I'd find some intervals, when my poor heart
> Should 'suage itself, and be let loose to thine.
> Though the bare earth be all our resting-place,
> Its roots our food, some cliff our habitation,
> I'll make this arm a pillow for thine head:
> And, as thou sighing liest, and swell'd with sorrow,
> Creep to thy bosom, pour the balm of love
> Into my soul, and kiss thee to thy rest;
> Then praise our God, and watch thee till the morning."

These sentiments are much the same as Prior throws into the poem of his Nutbrown Maid, and shew that nature and passion dictate the same sentiments, in similar situations, to all poets.

The scene where Belvidera is introduced to the conspirators is admirably pourtrayed by our Heroine. The shock she experiences at the discovery of the change in Jaffier's appearance and manner. Her pathetic invocation of heaven to bless him with patience, and his calm but apparently severe.

reply, intimating the necessity of their immediate parting, presents Miss O'Neill to high advantage. No one that hears the distraction with which she utters the words,

" Part! must we part? Oh! am I then forsaken?
Why drag you from me? whither are you going?
My dear! my life! my love!"

but must enter into the feelings of her situation.

The concluding passage of the same scene, when given up, and as she supposed, abandoned by Jaffier, calls forth such a burst of indignation at his unkind usage, and then changes to that feminine tenderness and grief, as almost overpower the audience, and oblige them to enter into her sufferings as real life.

" Oh, thou unkind one!
Have I deserv'd this from you?
Look on me, tell me, speak, thou dear deceiver,—
If I am false, accuse me; but if true,
Don't, pr'ythee don't, in poverty forsake me,
But pity the sad heart, that's torn with parting.
Yet, hear me! yet recal me.—Jaffier,—Jaffier!"

The opening scene of the third act, where Belvidera works upon the affections of Jaffier to discover the plot to her, is admirably conceived by the poet, and no less admirably represented by the actress. Her reproof for his apparent change of affection, her anxious desire to impress him with the firmness of her mind, to gain the secret, her happy application of the insult offered her the preceding night to work him up to her purpose, are all characterized in a style that make a most powerful impression. But the horror with which she receives the dreadful intimation of the intended murder of her father, cannot be described, but must be seen.

" Murder my father! Though his cruel nature
Has persecuted me to my undoing;
Driven me to basest wants; can I behold him,
With smiles of vengeance, butcher'd in his age?
The sacred fountain of my life destroyed?
And canst thou shed the blood that gave me being?"

She then recurs anew to the attack on her honour, as the strong incentive to master Jaffier's feelings, and thus shakes his resolution, and fixes him to betray the plot.

The parting words of the scene are peculiarly excellent. Her expression of

" 'Tis hard to part,"

is given with inconceivable pathos and interest. Her doubts and wish to believe Jaffier sincere,

" Sure no falsehood ever look'd so fairly,"

is uttered with a mixed feeling of doubt and grief, joined with an expression highly tender and characteristic; and the conclusion,

" Farewell: remember twelve,"

has a magic influence on every spectator, as the look, the tone, the manner, all unite in the most forcible appeal to the heart.

The second scene of the fourth act presents a different style of acting from the preceding part, where she assumes the lofty grandeur and heroic mien of bold persuasion and fortitude, and works upon the inconstant mind of Jaffier, by the love of his country, and the obligation incumbent upon him to save it from the impending danger, that his name may be chronicled

" Among the glorious legends of those few
That have sav'd sinking nations. Every street
Shall be adorn'd with statues to thy honour;
And, at thy feet, this great inscription written,—
' Remember him, that propp'd the fall of Venice!' "

Finding this however, ineffectual, by his reply, she then resorts to the talismanic charm, which has ever vanquished his firmness, the repetition of the insult offered her honour.

" Or, if thou think'st it nobler, let me live,
Till I'm a victim to the hateful will
Of that infernal devil!
Last night, my love!"

The words, "last night, my love!" are pronounced with such a forcible interest and appeal to his honour as a husband, and accompanied with such a deep and pointed expression of countenance, as speaks more than the words themselves. She repeats it again in still stronger terms as soon as she finds him wavering;

" Think what then may prove
My lot; the ravisher may then come safe,

And, 'midst the terror of the public ruin,
Do a damn'd deed."

And having wound him to her object, she completes her triumph by the reply,

" Hast thou a friend more dear than Belvidera ?"

into which she throws that exquisite tenderness which beggars description.

The entrance of Belvidera to Jaffier after the insulting conduct of Pierre, forms a scene in some parts of it unnatural. Belvidera is made by the poet, rather to increase the frenzy of Jaffier's mind, by introducing and continuing to dwell on the intended sufferings of his friends, instead of soothing him, and endeavouring to hide every unpleasant circumstance. This does not agree with all the preceding picture of her character. Nay, she pertinaciously persists to obtrude them upon him; for, when he says,

" Death ! doom'd to die ! condemn'd unheard ! unpleaded !

She replies,

" Nay, cruel'st racks and torments are preparing
To force confession from their dying pangs."

Feeling then she had wrought him up to distraction and madness, she exclaims,

" Oh! do not look so terribly upon me!
How your lips shake, and all your face disordered!"

The opening of the last act is an highly pathetic scene betwixt Priuli and his daughter, in which Miss O'Neill displays all that filial tenderness, and highly softened demeanour, both in look and expression, which constitutes one of her chief excellencies. Her reply to her father,

" A wretch, who, from the very top of happiness,
Am fallen into the lowest depths of misery,
And want your pitying hand to raise me up again,"

Is delivered with that gentleness and thrill of soft anguish in the tone that goes to the very soul, and far excels the strong shrill cadence of Mrs. Siddons, in the same part. The one literally plays round the head—we admire it, and it is lost; the other goes to the heart, and is rivetted. The expression,

" Yes! your daughter,"

is given with great felicity; and,

" Howe'er he deal with me,"

is preceded by a strong and emphatic pause, and then uttered so as to possess all the influence intended by it on the father's mind.

The conclusion of the scene is also very fine, when she says,

" Go, and remember,
" 'Tis Belvidera's life her father pleads for!"

The parting of Jaffier and Belvidera next offers a highly wrought and interesting scene. The softened and calm demeanour of Jaffier is here contrasted by the poignant grief and despondence of Belvidera. His blessings she receives with tears, and the sorrowing feelings of an agitated mind; but when he comes to express the words,

" Comfort her at parting!"

for which she was not prepared, it is an electric shock which shews Miss O'Neill's powers in a su-

perior manner. When heard to vent the strong burst of surprise,

" How? parting! parting!"

it interests and wounds every feeling. The expression, " for ever!" in the end, is given no less admirably.

On the whole, this tragedy is certainly well calculated for the display of Miss O'Neill's talents. Tenderness and softness are the predominant features of the Heroine, and therefore she has here the advantage of Mrs. Siddons in her superior expression of these qualities.

ISABELLA.

The choice of character next exhibited by Miss O'Neill is one of the most interesting on the British stage, the Isabella of Southerne, in his tragedy so termed, or the Fatal Marriage. It is a character of the most difficult representation, of the most harrowing effect on the audience, and from its length, requiring much exertion in the performer to execute it with undiminished talent.

Though the story is a hacknied one, yet it is a play full of extraordinary incidents, and so much lies on the Heroine, that all the rest form but secondary characters. This piece has always been considered as the first of Mrs. Siddons's representations, and so much of the sublime and terrible occurs in it, that it is well suited to shew to advantage her great powers. The character of the Heroine of this tragedy is one highly estimable as drawn by the poet, full of conjugal fidelity, and unshaken affection—of the nicest delicacy of feeling, and of the most virtuous principles—she yields to gratitude what she refuses to every other consideration. The portrait of her character is unfolded in the first scene with Villeroy,

" You have been
More than a brother to me, my friend;
And, at a time when friends are found no more,
A friend to my misfortunes."

She then adds,

" Would I could be yours;
But the unfortunate cannot be friends:"

Her recurrence to the memory of her deceased husband, and her appeal to the child in the same scene, are uncommonly fine, and given by Miss O'Neill with all the pathos and tender exclamation for which she is so remarkable,

> " My buried husband rises in the face
> Of my dear boy, and chides me for my stay:
> Canst thou forgive me, child?"

She winds it up with the following noble sentiment,

> " You see I grant you all
> That friendship will allow: be still my friend;
> That's all I can receive, or have to give."

The interview of Isabella with her father-in-law, is a grand appeal to the heart. Submissive, yet dignified and firm, Miss O'Neill gives effect to the choice incidents of the poet, with a tenderness and soothing tone of expression, that occasions an overwhelming sympathy in all that hear her. The beautiful reply to his stern question,

> " What could you expect from me?"

Is most delicately palliative to avoid offence,

" Oh, I have nothing to expect on earth!
But misery is very apt to talk:
I thought I might be heard."

She then, revolting suddenly at his cruelty, exclaims,

" Would my ruin please you?"

Finding it had not the effect, her tenderness again returns,

" For I am most undone,"

She utters with a poignancy of grief that cannot be too much admired. Her appeal to her child also to join her in her supplication to him, is equally affecting, and recalls the supplication of Priam to Achilles in Homer's Iliad. Perhaps it possesses equal pathos,

" Oh, my child!
Kneel with me, knock at nature in his heart:
Let the resemblance of a once-lov'd son
Speak in this little one, who never wrong'd you,
And plead the fatherless and widow's cause.
Oh, if you ever hope to be forgiven,
As you will need to be forgiven too,
Forget our faults, and heaven may pardon yours!"

But the finest part of this scene, and where Miss O'Neill shines in the strong portrait of indignation and maternal tenderness, is when her father-in-law offers to take her child, on condition of his never seeing her. The sudden burst with which she revolts at his offer, rivets the most unfeeling.

" What! take him from me!
No, we must never part: 'tis the last hold
Of comfort I have left; and when he falls,
All goes along with him: Oh!
I live but in my child.
No, let me pray in vain, and beg my bread
From door to door, to feed his daily wants,
Rather than always lose him."

The second scene, where she is left to her melancholy reflections, is a fine piece of pathetic declamation, and the conclusion is wound up with admirable expression and action by Miss O'Neill, when she says,

" Could I forget
What I have been, I might the better bear
What I am destin'd to: I am not the first
That have been wretched: but to think how much
I have been happier!——Wild hurrying thoughts

Start every way from my distracted soul,
To find out hope, and only meet despair."

Her reflections on the ring is given with the highest pathos. Her look to it at parting, as she gives it to the nurse, speaks more than language can convey :

" This ring is all I have left of value now:
'Twas giv'n me by my husband: his first gift
Upon our marriage: I've always kept it,
With my best care, the treasure next my life,
And now but part with it to support life,
Which only can be dearer."

The scene of the execution in Isabella's house presents also a portrait of finished acting. The manner and look in which she exclaims to Carlos's address, "a Husband!"—shews such a combination of suprise, indignation, and grief, that cannot be described. When at last, borne down by the importunities of her friends, the delicacy with which Miss O'Neill conveys the reluctant consent, shews her very correct conception of this trying situation.

" I have a soul that's truly sensible
Of your great worth, and busy to contrive,
If possible, to make you a return."

Her sudden revolt after the consent,

" Where am I going?
You cannot think it;"

gives fine scope to her admirable powers. Her after parrying with Villeroy, to get quit of it, is no less a fine trait of scenic effect; and the striking pause and affecting energy with which she at last pronounces

" I will be yours,"

present a high picture of dramatic excellence by our Heroine. Her after explanation, thinking she had gone too far, is inimitably fine,

" I give you all———
My hand; and would I had a heart to give."

The soliloquy of Isabella on the reception of Biron's ring, as given by Miss O'Neill, is one of the happiest essays of her genius, especially when she pronounces,

" This ring,
This little ring, with necromantic force
Has rais'd the ghost of pleasure to my fears :
Conjur'd the sense of honour and of love,
Into such shapes, they fright me from myself!"

She turns her face often, as it were averted from it by the recollection of what she had done. The disordered and distracted feeling so strongly displayed, give a wonderful interest to this part. The earnest and affrighted manner in which she surveys Biron, at his entrance, and the happy escape she thinks she has made in his not being her husband, contrasted so quickly by the discovery, present one of the finest and most difficult pieces of acting that can appear on the stage. Indeed, the whole of that scene requires a masterpiece of talent to do it justice, and the applause Miss O'Neill has received in it, is the best eulogium that can be made of her.

The rest of the play presents but one climax of horror. Her conclusion of her soliloquy, when she resolves on her destruction, is given with most exquisite tenderness and affection.

" Yet I will see him first,
Have a last look to heighten my despair,
And then to rest for ever.—"

The manner also in which she looks and speaks the words,

" Inquire no more, 'twill be explain'd too soon,"

Shews such a mixture of despair and harrowed feeling, that is truly admirable. The same she throws into the last word,

" When I am dead forgive and pity me."

The horrid scene that ensues is perhaps too long for the powers of any one to sustain in the terrific manner suited to it. It was in this Mrs. Siddons particularly excelled, and the hysteric laugh with which she ended it on stabbing herself, was so appalling as to produce a similar agitation in a great part of the female audience. Miss O'Neill, though she cannot carry it to the same extreme, certainly displays a most correct and affecting exhibition of the situation; and if she does not surpass Mrs. Siddons in this last part, we may fairly say in the introductory

scenes she gives more real pathos to the character of Isabella than any actress we have seen. We have accordingly dwelt more on the first part of the play, as better adapted to the display of Miss O'Neill's natural and affecting powers, than enlarged on the last, where, as we observed in a former part of the work, she labours under a physical disadvantage, and cannot be supposed to pourtray the *dreadfully terrific* with that boldness of voice, action, and supernatural energy, which is due to the less feminine appearance and gait of Mrs. Siddons.

MRS. BEVERLEY.

The next character, and a most trying one for the real dramatic powers of an actress, in which Miss O'Neill appeared, was Mrs. Beverley, in the Tragedy of the Gamester. This piece is the production of the late Mr. Moore, well-known as the author of Fables to the Fair Sex. It is a highly-interesting tragedy, as it draws its subject from ordinary life, and represents the catastrophe at-

tending a vice too general, and too often terminating the fate of the individual in much the same manner. If the tragedy of George Barnwell is annually represented as a lesson to the young tradesman, the tragedy of the Gamester has a claim to still more frequent representation, as exhibiting too faithful a picture to higher life, of the dreadful effects of the gambling table, and that certain ruin which is the attendant of deep play.

The scene here is one entirely domestic. It wants what we may term the majesty of woe. It possesses no meretricious accompaniments to deepen its effect. It requires simple, chaste, and faithful expression of natural passion, without ornament or exaggeration, and the great art lies to represent it in such a manner, as not to overstep the modesty of nature, but to exhibit it with fidelity. Miss O'Neill's representation of Mrs. Beverley shewed her clear and chaste conception of the part. Her earnestness of feeling, her deep sensibility, her great apparent eagerness and sincerity in the representation of her character, particularly fit her for this interesting picture of the over fond and unfortunate wife. In the scene with the old

steward, when she sends him to his master, the words,

> " I have never upbraided him,"

were pronounced with peculiar sensibility; and in the same scene with Stukely, when he hints her doubts of her husband's fidelity, the surprise she expresses,

> " What thoughts? I have no thoughts that wrong my husband,"

is given with an indignant feeling, suited to the nobleness of the female she represents; and in her after retort to him, when he says,

> " I meant to guard you against suspicion, not to alarm it."

Her reply possesses equal dignity with peculiar sensibility highly affecting, marking the outrage of the supposition to her feelings.

> " Nor have you, Sir. Who told you of suspicion? I have a heart it cannot reach."

The finest scene in this play for the powers of

an actress, is that where Stukely discovers his love to Mrs. Beverley; the burst of indignation with which she exclaims,

> " He has no mistress ;"

and her after keen reproaches at the insult offered her, exhibit finished specimens of fine and natural acting, not carried so far as the storm of Mrs. Siddons, but sufficient to give full effect to the situation and sentiments.

> " Am I then fallen,"

she exclaims,

> " so low? Has poverty so humbled me, that I should listen to a hellish offer and sell my soul for bread?"

The final scene is also well performed, for Miss O'Neill's triumph, it has been justly said, is in tears, and the shocking and convulsive laugh she utters, when borne off the stage, is admirably conceived and affectingly executed. In comparing her with Mrs. Siddons in this character, she has been considered as not so expressive of that *stately scorn*,

suited to some parts, but what is defective here is amply made up for in the excessive affection and melting tenderness of the unfortunate wife, bearing her trials with unshaken firmness, and finding out every palliation for the unworthy cause of them.

MRS. HALLER.

After Miss O'Neill's display of talent in so many leading characters of the British drama, she was now induced, perhaps from the example set her by Mrs. Siddons, to attempt a different line, and personify the much admired character of Mrs. Haller, in the Stranger, a production of the German theatre, and one of the most popular pieces from the pen of Kotzebue. It has been said of this actress, that all characters in her hands receive additional purity; and this is a strong reason for her representing the portraits of this modern school. The sterling good sense of this country is not easily led astray by the sophistry of the new philosophy. To be the frail fair one in reality, and yet a

pattern of purity and untainted mind, is a sophism not to be swallowed but by those who are fond of substituting the semblance of virtue for itself, and delight in the substitute without the reality. A Mrs. Haller and a Mary Wolstancroft are the same; and if their morality is to be the guide and standard of female excellence, virtue will be but an empty name, and guilt lose all its turpitude.

Mrs. Haller, however, in the hands of Miss O'Neill, and altered as the play is considerably from the original, could not fail to produce the most powerful impression. Her appearance displayed nothing of the giddy and careless character of most of the females drawn by the German dramatist: it shewed the super-eminent modesty which one in the critical circumstances of Mrs. Haller stood in need of, and which, by Miss O'Neill's correct judgment, was carried to its proper stretch. A reserved action, a delicate restrained voice, except when interrupted by the sudden bursts of violence which the part called for, are the pre-eminent traits of her representation; and the storm of passion over, the calm chastened demeanour returned, so suitable to her idea of the character. Indeed

through the whole of her representation, the native colouring of her mind was never lost, and her dress was particularly suited to the penitence and sombre shade of circumstances it delineates. In sorrow it is allowed she is not to be resisted. Perhaps no play ever appeared to greater advantage on the British stage. The acting of Mr. Kemble, as the Stranger, was equally great in his walk as the Mrs. Haller of Miss O'Neill. We may here observe, that this was the first play in which the Critics gave a full and unqualified admission of Miss O'Neill's merits, and laid aside the rather too invidious comparisons constantly kept up betwixt her and Mrs. Siddons. It is only, however, in the last act of this piece that the real powers of Miss O'Neill are called forth: the confession scene is supported with all the penitence, but at the same time with all the dignity and grace that shews her though fallen, yet conscious of what she has been, and that to fall below the dignity of Count Waldbourg's wife, in her acknowledgment of her error, would be lessening its value even in the eyes of the offended husband who had a right to it.

"Leave me now, I beseech you;"

and her address to the Stranger—

"My Lord,"

are affecting in the introduction of the scene in the extreme, and given with uncommon pathos. The manner also in which she pronounces, and the look with which she accompanies

"Then nothing now remains but that one sad, hard, just word—farewell!"

are irresistibly touching. The fine incidents also in descanting on the jewels which are employed by the poet, and so happily and impressively expressed by Miss O'Neill, to work on the affections of her husband, were never represented in so superior a manner as by Miss O'Neill. The melting softness of voice, the tender, pathetic, and expressive look of agonizing regret, and the noble refusal with which it concludes, had irresistible charms on the senses of the audience.

"How well do I recollect the sweet evening when you gave me these! That evening, my father joined our

> hands; and joyfully I pronounced the oath of eternal fidelity.—It is broken. This locket, you gave me on my birth-day—That was a happy day! We had a country feast—How cheerful we all were!—This bracelet, I received after my William was born!—No! take them—take them—I cannot keep these, unless you wish that the sight of them should be an incessant reproach to my almost broken heart.

The agitation also, on the Stranger's pronouncing the word

> "Farewell,"

with which she entreats

> "Oh! but one minute more! An answer to but one more question.—Feel for a mother's heart!—Are my children still alive?"

harrow the very soul, and excite every energy of it in unison with her captivating powers.

The extasy of happy feeling with which the play concludes, and the pity awakened by the noble mind and generous feelings of the husband and wife, make us alive only to the present situation, and forget equally the crime and the breach of mo-

rality which it inculcates. To this her powers are confined.

GRECIAN DAUGHTER.

The only unequal attempt which Miss O'Neill has made is in her next character, the Grecian Daughter, in Murphy's tragedy of that name. It is founded on a celebrated Grecian story of the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse, and though it is a tragedy not without many defects, the character of the heroine interests so strongly from the excess of filial affection, as to render it highly popular.

The excess of filial affection, however, is here of the most elevated nature, and requires a command of the greatest physical powers, such as the constitution and disposition of Miss O'Neill is not adequately fitted to accomplish: yet even here we may have much to praise. Her attempt was a *daring* happy beyond expectation; and if she failed in reaching the summit of the sublime, it was not from want of a just conception of the character,

but from what nature has denied. Her's is the empire of the soft emotions, and the character of Euphrasia is one of masculine energies, of pre-eminent courage and virtues; one that, in fact, towers above the delicacy, we shall not say weaknesses, of her sex. She is cast in a Spartan mould, and possesses all that enthusiasm of filial affection which so much distinguished those ancient days, when the relation betwixt the parent and child was preferred to every other duty, and was the greatest recommendation in an heroic character. Thus Euphrasia exclaims—

> " Could I desert my father? Could I leave
> The venerable man, who gave me being,
> A victim here in Syracuse, nor stay
> To watch his fate, to visit his affliction,
> To cheer his prison hours, and with the tear
> Of filial virtue bid ev'n bondage smile?"

As civilization advances, and the connexions multiply, this first of the chain of intimate relatives is too apt to be weakened, and few of the heroic achievements of modern times are built on such a foundation.

This tragedy, possessing in it the height of the sublime, and mixing in its leading parts much of the terrific and wonderful, rather tends, in many parts, to horrify than please. Even the first appearance of Euphrasia carries with her rage and tempest, as she cries out—

> " War on, ye heroes,
> Ye great asserters of a monarch's cause!
> Let the wild tempest rage:"

and also, further on, where she exclaims—

> " Come, vengeance, come, shake off this feeble sex,
> Sinew my arm, and guide it to his heart.
> And thou, O filial piety, that rul'st
> My woman's breast, turn to vindictive rage;
> Assume the port of justice; show mankind
> Tyrannic guilt had never dar'd, in Syracuse,
> Beyond the reach of virtue."

Yet even in this play Miss O'Neill exhibited great skill in many of the leading scenes: her solicitation to Philotas in particular was impressively striking: her burst of indignation in the following

passage was great, and suited to the bold dignified virtue of the character.

> " And if you dare!——Is that
> The voice of manhood? Honest, if you dare!
> 'Tis the slave's virtue! 'Tis the utmost limit
> Of a base coward's honour.—Not a wretch,
> There's not a villain, not a tool of pow'r,
> But, silence, interest, extinguish fear,
> And he will prove benevolent to man.
> The gen'rous heart does more: will dare to all
> That honour prompts.——How dost thou dare to murder?——
> Respect the gods, and know no other fear."

Her after gratitude, on his consenting to give her access to her father, expressed in a choked hysterical manner, was no less contrasted by her previous portrait of the different and elevated passion.

The scene with the tyrant was also highly interesting and well performed. Indignation, contempt, and abhorrence, were pourtrayed in their strongest colours, and with a felicity which brought forth successive bursts of applause.

But the reception given to her husband before the tomb may be considered as the most eminent part of the whole, by giving scope to all those fine emotions of tenderness which so innately characterize Miss O'Neill, and where she shewed admirable judgment in marking the difference between her strong filial, and warm conjugal feelings.

The conclusion, when she stabs the tyrant, was grand and appalling: the expression—the attitude and voice, were all magnanimous and terrific, as she pronounced—

"A daughter's arm, fell monster, strikes the blow:"

and afterwards the smile of contempt and heroism, as she repeats---

"Yes, tyrant, yes; in a dear father's cause,
A woman's vengeance tow'rs above her sex,"

gives a most glorious finish to the catastrophe. If, therefore, in the Grecian Daughter Miss O'Neill is not so strongly and commandingly impressive as Mrs. Siddons, it is not from defect of taste, judgment, or a proper conception of the character, but

from the bare circumstance that nature has cast her in a different mould; yet this mould, as we learn from her private history, has ever been replete, much to her credit, with the warmest filial affection. In this character, therefore, it is herself, not the actress, that speaks.

JANE SHORE.

One of the most popular tragedies on the British stage was the next subject of Miss O'Neill's attractions. It is a private story, interwoven with our general history, and it claims an interest from its truth, from the unfortunate end of the heroine, the victim of cruel punishment, and from the traditionary barbarity of the Prince, Richard the IIId, who inflicted it. The remembrance also of it is kept alive in the metropolis by the very name of the female being continued to the supposed place—Shoreditch, where she perished.

This story has been wrought by Rowe into a tragedy of considerable merit, and may be consi-

dered, if not actually his first, at least his best received production, having kept constant possession of the stage from its first appearance. It is said by the author himself to be written in imitation of Shakspeare. In what respect this is the case, no critic has been able to discover, and the author perhaps pleased himself with this idea. This tragedy, however, contains many admirable passages, expressed with all the rich glowing language for which Rowe is so deservedly distinguished. The character of the heroine here is that of the penitent and repentant wife, a character in the delineation of which Miss O'Neill cannot fail to carry the palm from Mrs. Siddons, from natural feeling and constitutional softness.

The portrait of her grief in the opening scene, on the mentioning of *Antwerp*, gives a fine display of sorrow, contrition, and shame.

> "Alas! at Antwerp!—Oh, forgive my tears!
> They fall for my offences—and must fall
> Long, long ere they shall wash my stains away.
> You knew, perhaps—Oh grief! Oh shame!—my husband."

" Oh, that my soul had known no joy but him!
That I had lived within his guiltless arms,
And dying slept in innocence beside him!
But now his dust abhors the fellowship,
And scorns to mix with mine."

Another passage equally fine is, where she treats Alicia's praise with scorn:

" Name him no more!
He was the bane and ruin of my peace.
This anguish and these tears, these are the legacies
His fatal love has left me. Thou wilt see me,
Believe me, my Alicia, thou wilt see me,
Ere yet a few short days pass o'er my head,
Abandon'd to the very utmost wretchedness.
The hand of power has seiz'd almost the whole
Of what was left for needy life's support;
Shortly thou wilt behold me poor, and kneeling
Before thy charitable door for bread."

And the conclusion of this act presents one of the most moral sentiments, in rich, flowing language, which has been spoken with rapture by every great actress, and to which Miss O'Neill does ample justice, in the interest and exquisite pathos she gives them.

"Such is the fate unhappy women find,
And such the curse entailed upon our kind,
That man, the lawless libertine may rove,
Free and unquestion'd, through the wilds of love;
While woman, sense and nature's easy fool:
If poor weak woman swerve from virtue's rule;
If, strongly charmed, she leave the thorny way,
And in the softer paths of pleasure stray,
Ruin ensues, reproach and endless shame,
And one false step entirely damns her fame;
In vain with tears the loss she may deplore,
In vain look back on what she was before;
She sets, like stars that fall, to rise no more."

These sentiments of Rowe may be considered as the standard English opinion on the subject of female frailty, contrasted with the modern school of Kotzebue, as inferred by his portrait of Mrs. Haller in the Stranger, on which we formerly commented. If this is the opinion of this country towards *frail fair* ones in a single state, how much stronger does it fall to be, where the unfortunate female is a mother and a wife.

The scene between Jane Shore and Lord Hastings displays a fine mixture of penitence and dignity, of outraged feeling sensible of injury, and conscious

of the insult, yet overpowered by shame, as she ventures to complain, how pathetic when she repeats,

" Nor turn your eyes this way, where sin and misery,
Like loathsome weeds, have over-run the soil,
And the destroyer, Shame, has laid all waste."

The scene betwixt her and the protector is highly animated. Her eagerness to become an instrument of good, her feeling and gratitude to the memory of her royal friend; her surprise to find Hastings the defender of the rights of unprotected and infant royalty; the warm tribute of respect she pays him on that account in spite of the dangers suspending over her from the threats of the tyrant, present some of the finest traits of virtuous indignation and pathetic feeling that have been witnessed at any time on the stage. The manner in which she says

" Stand by, and see his children robb'd of right ?"

was dignified and impressive. Her after repetition of it in these elegant flowing lines are no less of a piece.

" Oh, that my tongue had ev'ry grace of speech,
Great and commanding as the breath of kings,

That I had art and eloquence divine,
To pay my duty to my master's ashes,
And plead, till death, the cause of injured innocence."

Her soliloquy in the progress of her penance gives to Miss O'Neill's attractions in the pathetic full scope, and admirably speaks the forlorn situation of the fair mourner. The fearful and anxious gaze, as she looks round and knocks at Alicia's door, is also remarkably fine. Her reflections on the change are beautifully delivered, especially

"But now 'tis otherwise."

Her reply to Alicia,

"Alas! I never wronged thee,"

is inimitably melting and tender.

The concluding scene with her husband, where penitence is combined with all the mixture of shame, love, and submission, is so overwhelming as represented by Miss O'Neill, that the spectator must be made of stern stuff indeed who can view it and hear her speak without paying the just tribute of a tear. To the last words,

"Forgive me!—but forgive me!"

it is beyond expression to do justice.

This play is certainly one of the most finished of Miss O'Neill's representation; and as it abounds entirely in the soft and melting theme of woe, she is here more at home, and we are rather surprized it is not oftener represented.

ELWINA.

Miss O'Neill's next representation of Elwina in the tragedy of Percy, the production of Miss Hannah More, may be considered as a proper tribute of respect to the memory of the deserving authoress of this piece, whose pen was so much devoted to the cause of religion and morals.

The subject of this tragedy is taken from the border history, and relates to the known feuds between the rival families of Percy and Douglas. The tale is a hacknied one; but the character of the heroine is one of high honour and purity; and of all these nice principles which distinguished, according to Mr. Burke, that age of chivalry. Jealousy is the predominant passion which produces the horri-

ble catastrophe of the piece—and the demeanour of the heroine is that of passive duty. She feels as a woman while she acts with honor and dignity as a wife. The first interview betwixt Elwina and Douglas unfolds the dispositions of the parties.

" I come,"

she says, with a peculiar pensive softness,

" unbidden,
Except by faithful duty, to inquire,
If haply in my power, my little power,
I have the means to minister relief
To your affliction ?"

Finding she had no influence on his suspicions, she breaks out with dignified firmness in her reply, laying aside her tenderness of address.

" Learn, Sir, that virtue, while 'tis free from blame,
Is modest, lowly, meek, and unassuming;
Not apt, like fearful vice, to shield its weakness,
Beneath the studied pomp of boastful phrase,
Which swells to hide the poverty it shelters;
But when this virtue feels itself suspected,
Insulted, set at nought, its whiteness stain'd,
It then grows proud, forgets its humble worth,
And rates itself above its real value."

He then hints his suspicions of Percy, when she exclaims, with wonderful anxiety and surprize,

" Hold, hold, my lord!
What may this mean?"

The painful agitation she also shews on his intimation of the king's return, and her going to court, and the look of confusion she discovers as she asks,

" Must I, my lord?"

is given by Miss O'Neill in her happiest manner. Her reply also to his fervent entreaties is no less admirably delivered.

" My lord, retirement is a wife's best duty,
And virtue's safest station is retreat."

The scene betwixt Elwina and her father is one of high interest, in which Miss O'Neill unfolds all the pathetic powers of her natural disposition. The surprize and agony she experiences at her father's reception of her, when he sternly repeats

" Elwina!"

and the anguish with which she expresses—

"And is that all? so cold!"

the repetition of it, when she bursts into the piteous exclamation,

"Then I'm undone, indeed!"

and her persisting still to approach him with the firm resolution of filial tenderness,

"I will not be repuls'd, I am your child,
The child of that dear mother you ador'd;
You shall not throw me off, I will grow here,
And, like the patriarch, wrestle for a blessing,"

all present the most impressive and affecting display of Miss O'Neill's talent in subduing the heart and captivating the feelings: her noble reply, also,

"Sir, do not fear me: am I not your daughter?"

is grand and heroic, suited to the character.

In the scene where Sir Hubert relates the account of the crusade, and eulogizes Percy—the

eager look and manner with which she expresses the wish of her heart, in her question,

" Then he lives!"

and the seeming satisfaction displayed till he repeats,

" He died the death of honour,"

and her anxious, hesitating belief,

" Say'st thou—he died?"

which did not wish to be convinced of the dreadful tale, exhibit some of the finest specimens of acting to be seen on the stage. Her surprize also, after pronouncing the name of Percy, on recovering herself, and finding Douglas present, in look, manner, and expression, shew a portrait of the deep and harrowing passions of the soul, that can only be seen, and cannot be adequately described. Her interview with Percy in the bower may be considered as the most finished part of the whole. The marked astonishment at seeing him, the joy experienced at first, before reflecting on her situation as

the wife of Douglas, and her unwillingness and shame in unfolding her marriage, particularly when she says, in reply to his ardent wishes,

" O never—never—never!"

and then the painful pause which ensues, before she can bring out,

" I am, I am——".

(while he urges her silence)

" Speak! say! what art thou?"

and at last, with the most agonizing accent, she expresses,

" Married!"

are all given with that superior conception and address that justly entitle Miss O'Neill to be a first-rate favourite. Her defence is given with most winning pathos.

" But his tears!
Ah, they undid me! Percy, dost thou know

The cruel tyranny of tenderness?
Hast thou e'er felt a father's warm embrace?
Hast thou e'er seen a father's flowing tears,
And known that thou cou'dst wipe those tears away?
If thou hast felt, and hast resisted these,
Then thou mayst curse my weakness; but if not,
Thou canst not pity, for thou canst not judge."

In the after scene, when Percy threatens the life of Douglas, her reply is exquisitely fine.

"Percy, hold!
Think not 'tis Douglas—'tis——"

The pause and break-off is here admirable. Her appeal to him in regard to her character, is no less interesting.

"When I was robb'd of all my peace of mind,
My cruel fortune left me still one blessing,
One solitary blessing, to console me;
It was my fame.—'Tis a rich jewel, Percy,
And I must keep it spotless, and unsoil'd:
But thou wou'dst plunder what e'en Douglas spar'd,
And rob this single gem of all its brightness."

The earnestness with which she entreats Percy to leave her,

> "I do conjure thee, go,"

and the manner in which she repeats to his

> "Farewell! farewell!"

the words

> "For ever!"

give a pang to every heart of sensibility that witnesses her efforts.

The conflict between Percy and Douglas is also a scene of deep interest, and the anxiety displayed by Elwina for the life of Percy is noble and pathetic, especially when she says,

> "It blazes brighter!
> Douglas was only brave—he now is gen'rous!"

The scene between Douglas and Elwina, on presenting the bloody scarf, displays the most digni-

fied grief that ever was exhibited, when she says, in a low broken voice,

" Douglas—think not I faint because thou se'st
The pale and bloodless cheek of wan despair.
Fail me not yet, my spirits; thou cold heart,
Cherish thy freezing current one short moment,
And bear thy mighty load a little longer."

The solemnity also with which she pronounces

" No;
The sorrow's weak that wastes itself in words,
Mine is substantial anguish—deep, not loud;
I do not rave.——Resentment's the return
Of common souls for common injuries,
Light grief is proud of state, and courts compassion!
But there's a dignity in cureless sorrow,
A sullen grandeur which disdains complaint.
Rage is for little wrongs—Despair is dumb.

The last scene of the madness winds up the catastrophe, and is performed by Miss O'Neill with equal ability as in the other similar situations in which we have witnessed her powers.

The tragedy of Percy is an interesting one in point of incidents, but it wants that ease of dialogue and those fine touches of nature so highly captivating in the standard pieces we have hitherto criticised.

MONIMIA.

The next character which has added to the eclat of Miss O'Neill's dramatic powers, is the Monimia of Otway in his *Orphan*. This tragedy was an early production of Otway's muse, and was first brought out in 1680. Since that time it has remained a standard piece, though in many parts licentious beyond the bounds of decency, and painting a crime too horrid for the feelings to dwell on. It is written however, with such powers of language, with such force of passion, and with those strong and characteristic traits of the heart in the warm expression of its feelings, which take a deep hold of an audience, and interest them in the highest degree. It is founded, as we have noticed, on a crime at which

human nature revolts with horror; yet so much is felt for the parties, that the extent and nature of the guilt is forgot in the pity which their trying and unmerited situations excite. It is one of those plays where as much depends on the other principal characters as the heroine, and it is difficult on that account often to fill it up as it ought. It partakes in many of its parts, as already noticed, of the licentiousness of the age in which it was written; when, in the words of Johnson, "intrigue was plot, obscenity was wit." Those parts, however, are very happily suppressed in the representation by the more correct judgment of the present day, and the play as now exhibited presents all its beauties without its blemishes.

The character of Monimia is particularly interesting as an orphan and dependent. She feels all the ties of gratitude and affection as the child of adoption in the family where she resides, and betwixt respect for her protector, the friend of her father, and attachment to his youngest son, she has a difficult conflict to maintain. As happens in all cases, where the female character is concerned, passion predominates over every other consideration. Her love for Castalio leads her to deceive his brother, and in so

doing, the revenge of the latter produces that catastrophe which finishes the scene of distress.

It would seem as if Southerne and Otway, both poets of the same age, had formed two tragedies to resemble each other. In both a female is the predominant character. Southerne has given his Isabella two husbands, and Otway his Monimia two lovers. Some of the beautiful passages in both plays also nearly resemble each other; particularly the fine simile of the garden as put into the mouth of Chamont, by Otway, in beautiful detail; but more concisely introduced by Southerne in the affecting scene of Isabella and her father. The character of Monimia is not one of very high elevation. She is a young lady of virtue and honour, and in other respects not much is to be said. It therefore only calls for extraordinary exertions towards the conclusion of the catastrophe.

The character of Monimia is drawn by herself,

> "Why was I made with all my sex's softness,
> Yet want the cunning to conceal its follies?
> I'll see Castalio, tax him with his falsehoods,
> Be a true woman, rail, protest my wrongs;
> Resolve to hate him, and yet love him still.

The interview between her and the brothers begins the display of Miss O'Neill's powers, and the manner in which she repeats

> " Will you then leave me thus ?"

exhibits high spirit and feeling: the conclusion also, when Castalio persists, is given with a proper mixture of scorn and indignation.

> " Then go, and, if it be possible, for ever."

Her reply, likewise, to Polydore, is uncommonly fine.

> " For tho' to Fortune lost, I'll still inherit
> My mother's virtues, and my father's honour."

Perhaps there is no part of this tragedy so truly pathetic, and uniting with the most affecting images a most admirable simplicity of language, as Chamont's relation of his parent's death to Acasto, and as it gives a greater interest for Monimia, it deserves to be quoted here.

" When our dear parents died, they died together,
One fate surpris'd 'em, and one grave receiv'd 'em;
My father with his dying breath bequeath'd
Her to my love; my mother, as she lay,
Languishing by him, call'd me to her side,
Took me in her fainting arms, wept, and embrac'd me:
Then press'd me close, and as she observ'd my tears,
Kiss'd them away; said she, Chamont, my son,
By this, and all the love I ever shew'd thee,
Be careful of Monimia; watch her youth;
Let not her wants betray her to dishonour:
Perhaps kind Heav'n may raise some friend. Then sigh'd,
Kiss'd me again; so bless'd us, and expir'd."

It is not properly till the third act that Miss O'Neill's attractions are called into full action, and the scene between her and Castalio, after the advantage taken by Polydore, and each ignorant of the deception, is one of the most finished pieces of stage effect that she has displayed. Her eagerness and joy to meet him, her surprise at his coldness—her fondness and affection in endeavouring to appease him, particularly when she says,

" Oh kill me here, or tell me my offence!
I'll never quit you else; but on these knees,

Thus follow you all day, 'till they're worn bare,
And hang upon you like a drowning creature."

The plaintive softness also with which she replies,

" It was our wedding night;"

and the subsequent part, when she bursts out into the most poignant exclamation, shews Miss O'Neill to the highest advantage, and equals any other situation in which she appears.

The following scene is likewise very great, where Monimia encounters her brother, and discovers her seeming wrongs from Castalio, and the tenderness with which she concludes it, is particularly affecting.

" Nay, now, Chamont, art thou unkind as he is!
Didst thou not promise me thou wouldst be calm?
Keep my disgrace conceal'd?
Alas! I love him still! and though I ne'er
Clasp him again within these longing arms,
Yet bless him, bless him, Gods! where'er he goes!"

Another fine passage in this play, which has

been quoted on all occasions, is Chamont's introduction of his sister's wrongs to Acasto.

" You took her up a little tender flower,
Just sprouted on a bank, which the next frost
Had nipt; and with a careful loving hand,
Transplanted her into your own fair garden,
Where the sun always shines: there long she flourish'd,
Grew sweet to sense, and lovely to the eye,
Till at the last a cruel spoiler came,
Cropt this fair rose, and rifled all its sweetness,
Then cast it like a loathsome weed away."

The parting between Monimia and Acasto is excellently performed. The stern manner in which he addresses her,

" You are my daughter,"

is most strikingly contrasted by her tender and plaintive reply,

" I am, my lord, if you'll vouchsafe to own me;"

and her after pathetic reflections on her forlorn

situation, are given with exquisite and overpowering poignancy of distress.

" Now I'm undone for ever: who on earth
Is there so wretched as Monimia?
First by Castalio cruelly forsaken;
I've lost Acasto now: his parting frowns
May well instruct me, rage is in his heart:
I shall be next abandon'd to my fortune,
Thrust out a naked wand'rer to the world,
And branded for the mischievous Monimia!
What will become of me! my cruel brother
Is framing mischiefs too, for aught I know,
That may produce bloodshed and horrid murder!
I would not be the cause of one man's death,
To reign the empress of the earth; nay, more,
I'd rather lose for ever my Castalio,
My dear, unkind Castalio!

The interview between Monimia and Polydore, when he hints at his deceitful possession of her, and the surprize and agony she shews on the first surmise, when she exclaims,

" Hah! have a care!"

and next, the eagerness and anxiety with which

she presses for an explicit answer, are given with the happiest effect, both in voice and look, by Miss O'Neill.

Perhaps the finest scene of the whole play is that betwixt Monimia and Castalio, after the discovery from Polydore, and when her mind being made up on her destruction, she says,

"I cannot die in peace, till I have seen him."

The solemn manner in which she pronounces to his ecstatic eagerness,

"No nearer, lest I vanish,"

and the high-wrought pathos of the whole part, is beautifully affecting and tender. The conclusion of the scene, when she leaves him in uncertainty, has been reckoned one of the greatest beauties of the poet, and one of the most trying parts for the actress to give it full energy and expression. It consists only of three words—

"Ah, poor Castalio!"

This, in the mouth of Mrs. Oldfield, who threw into it all that grief, horror, and despair could picture, mingled, at the same time, with tender affection, never failed to throw the audience into tears.

In this part it has been said our heroine has not given so much satisfaction; but her powers are fully capable of giving it all the influence of an Oldfield, and it requires only to be noticed.

In her dying and pathetic address to Castalio, Miss O'Neill eminently shines. The soft and plaintive tenderness of exhausted nature so suitable to her miserable state, thrills and rivets the soul, and engages every feeling in her favour.

On the whole, the character of Monimia is one which in the hands of a tolerable actress will interest, but in that of Miss O'Neill is exquisitely overpowering. It gives a loose to all the natural softness and bent of her disposition, and in Monimia she is as much at home as in Juliet.

ISABELLA.

The play of Measure for Measure, though presents a character of elevated purity and sanctified virtue in the heroine, we do not think a part sufficiently interesting for Miss O'Neill to have chosen for her next representation. The piece, like too many of that age, is disgraced by much coarse ribaldry and obscene wit, and Isabella appears so seldom that we have only reason to regret that Miss O'Neill has so little business on the stage. It is like holding out expectation to us, and then withholding the feast.

In the scene with Lucio, when informed by him of her brother's situation, Miss O'Neill, as Isabella, displays all her tenderest sensibility.

> "Doth he so seek his life?"

she repeats with the most anxious solicitude; and

And most pernicious purpose! Seeming, seeming!—
I will proclaim thee, Angelo; look for't:
Sign me a present pardon for my brother,
Or, with an outstretch'd throat, I'll tell the world
Aloud, what man thou art."

But this nice sense of elevated honour and principle is still carried farther in the scene with her brother, particularly where she says,

"Dar'st thou die?
The sense of death is most in apprehension;
And the poor beetle, that we tread upon,
In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great
As when a giant dies."

The satisfaction she feels at his reply is no less great and magnanimous.

There spake my brother; there my father's grave
Did utter forth a voice! Yes, thou must die:
Thou art too noble to conserve a life
In base appliances."

The horror and contempt she feels next, for her brother, on his change of sentiments, and desire

of life, become beautifully contrasted with her previous carriage to him.

"What says my brother?"

she repeats with the most emphatic and alarming surprize; then the noble and disdainful conclusion is a climax to the whole.

"Take my defiance:
Die; perish! Might but my bending down
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed:
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death;
No word to save thee."

Her grief, on finding the Duke reject her petition, is also a happy display of Miss O'Neill's powers.

"And is this all?
Then, oh, you blessed ministers above,
Keep me in patience; and with ripen'd time,
Unfold the evil which is here wrapt up
In countenance! Heaven shield your grace from woe,
As I, thus wrong'd, hence unbelieved go!"

But still, with all these excellencies we have

pointed out, we consider this play as by no means one of Shakspeare's first-rate productions; and though the character of Isabella has been a favourite one with many of the greatest actresses, yet there are other tragedies of a more interesting kind, which would equally suit Miss O'Neill's talents, and better please an audience to see her appear in them.

Having traced Miss O'Neill in all her appearances on the London stage, let us now estimate her powers by the ordeal of particular criticism, under the heads of Voice, Expression, Action, Dress, and General Deportment.

No qualification is so important in a public character, and particularly for one who is devoted to the business of the stage, as the advantages of voice. This itself has often carried an indifferent actor through his part, with an approbation he was otherwise not entitled to. To a first-rate performer it gives an irresistible charm. The silver tones of a Barry are still the theme of admiration by those who have heard him, when from disease incapable

of that graceful action which marked his prime. The hollow impressive modulation of a Kemble commands attention, and pleases, even though somewhat monotonous, by its judicious pauses. The strong clear harmony of a Siddons gives her the command of every character from the lowest tone of grief and despair, to the highest altitude of violent and ungovernable passion. The want of this great and imposing advantage is the chief defect of Mr. Kean. With a just conception of character, and with a well-chosen and commanding action, he fails to please from an inharmonious voice, which grates harsh on the ear, and is lost entirely in the impassioned parts. On the contrary, Miss O'Neill's voice possesses a just melody, with sufficient strength to give utterance to the most violent bursts of stormy action, and sinking again, soft and sweet, into the true pitch of female modulation. It is suited equally to the deep thrill of horror, as to the soft swell of sensibility and feeling. Wanting the masculine strength of a Siddons, it never loses the delicate pitch that should characterise the female tone. Miss O'Neill's voice then, ably seconds her other great powers,

it gives a prepossession where she is even not seen, in her favour, and the sense of the poet comes not only with every advantage in point of action before the audience, but at the same time it may be added, with a pleasing harmony from her tongue.

To look the character is no less necessary to perfection in acting than to speak it. The cast of features should comport, if possible, with the circumstances of the representation. The strong marked lineaments of countenance that distinguish Mrs. Siddons, fit her for those grand and elevated individuals she represents; grandeur and dignity are pictured in her appearance, and we thus mistake the substitute for reality. Miss O'Neill's lines of face, present a happy medium, and conscious of this, she has with much good sense confined her acting to scenes of domestic life, rather than the commanding and heroic characters that move on a throne, and present the picture of royal distress. The dignified female character, whose excess of sensibility is predominant, is well pourtrayed in

her countenance, and seconded in every movement of her action. Though not possest of the real graces of beauty, there is nothing in her cast of features to offend; every line is impressive, calculated to strike and support the dramatic situation in which she is placed.

Justness of action, appropriate to the circumstances of the representation, is the grand criterion of dramatic taste in a performer. With inferior performers this is apt to become mechanical, and the same character is universally executed by them with the same identical movements, without novelty or variety. Nothing is so disgusting to an audience, and lessens the merit of the first actor, where he confines himself to this sameness of delineation. This fault is not to be attributed to Miss O'Neill. With a just conception of her characters, she shews on repetition, that they may be varied, and that the representation of the passions, in imitation of nature, admits that latitude which individual feeling every day displays, in the occurrences of life. This merit also marks a proper acquaintance with the

human character, and with the movements of the heart, the principle that directs the corresponding action of the body, and produces a natural or faulty gesture, which is its expression according to the judgment that gives manner and utterance to it.

If it is essential to look the character, this will be much assisted by the dress of the performer, or adapting it to the individual circumstances of the representation. For a Roman senator or general to harangue in a British dress is preposterous in the extreme, and the part completely loses its effect. An attention to the dress of the character was much neglected in former periods of the drama: the correctness of the present age has strictly enforced this. Miss O'Neill has, in this respect, closely copied her predecessor, Mrs. Siddons, and the costume of the country where the scene is laid should never be dispensed with in the smallest trifle. Miss O'Neill dresses with all the elegance and consequence of the characters she represents, and by avoiding an excess of meretricious orna-

ments on the one hand, and too much plainness on the other, she studies the proper medium where taste and true elegance are united.

By general deportment, we mean that union of the preceding circumstances which carry with them decided approbation and effect. Miss O'Neill in figure, manner, and appearance, is equally fascinating in characterizing the young unmarried female and the sedate matron. This has been remarked as one of her excellencies, that she possesses all the gravity and sedateness of the mother and wife, no less than the gentle and unsettled character of the young lady. Hence she personates, with equal success, the playful love-sick Juliet and the woe-worn unhappy Isabella. This is an excellence Mrs. Siddons could never attain, for on the London stage she appeared always the wife and the mother; and where she acted a young character, she failed in it only from the circumstance of her having passed the vale of youth: she looked not the character she acted so well. This then is an advantage Miss O'Neill will retain for many years.

Having thus pointed out the chief excellencies of Miss O'Neill, we hope she will continue to follow the example of her predecessor, in confining her representations to a certain number of standard characters. To excel in the arduous style of acting which claims perfection, every representation must be her daily study and midnight dream: she must enter into every particular of the character with interest, feeling, and a close attention to the most trifling minutiæ. Hence we find that every actor who appears on the stage is generally tolerable in his first representation, which he has closely studied, in the hopes of success: as soon, however, as he departs from it, and takes up another, then comes the test of his talents, and it either damns him or ensures his reputation. But even after a dramatic reputation has been established, some of the first actors have lost themselves by extending their characters too far, and varying the walk in which they have originally begun. To support a lead on the stage for years, and please the fastidious and capricious taste of the town, requires "a Shakspeare's nature and a Jonson's art." This cannot be too strongly inculcated into the mind of this deserving actress.

Such is the picture we have now offered at large of Miss O'Neill's attractions as a public character, and we descend, with no less satisfaction, to a review of her private life and domestic conduct. Instead of assuming a consequence from her successful efforts, and from that applause which would have acted on a weak or enthusiastic mind, she retains all that native mildness and gentleness of demeanour which is the natural bent of her disposition. Her success has only enabled her to unfold to more advantage those virtues which the want of means could not stifle, but restrain; and in the character of a daughter and sister she has shone with still more eclat than in the representation of any feigned greatness to which she is accustomed to give utterance on the stage. Her family owes to her that independence they could not otherwise have acquired, and the rewards of her talents are not lavished on herself, but extended to all the circle of her young relatives that surround her. It would be improper to decend into particulars on a subject of this kind: it is enough to say, that Miss O'Neill's conduct is so correct in every respect as to dare the utmost malevolence of envy "to cast a blot on her

fair fame." Fond of retirement and the study of her profession, her visits are few and select; and whatever society she frequents, she accepts no invitation but joined with the company of her brothers or other near friends. This correctness of behaviour cannot be too much praised. If the stage is really to be considered, as it ought to be, a school of morality, the lessons of it she enforces so admirably by her representations, she confirms no less by her example; and to the too general opprobrium which is attached to the conduct of theatrical life, she forms a laudable exception. Unambitious of passing into a higher sphere than that *happy mean* where social enjoyment is most to be found, she has refused the dazzling allurements of title and rank, where coupled with a want of those attractions which can only give satisfaction in the nuptial state.

The hand of an Irish peer (Lord M.) it is said, was offered to her, which she refused, deeming the inequality betwixt them in mental feeling too great a sacrifice, on her part, for the coronet and gilded misery.

It has been rumoured, perhaps on a very vague

foundation, that a young Irish barrister, of rising merit, is the Romeo destined to lead this accomplished Juliet to the Hymeneal altar, *she* "*nothing loth:*" but whatever there may be in this surmise, probably but the tale of the day, we should be sorry not to see Miss O'Neill, for her own interest, continue *single* for a few years, till she has acquired all that consequence and independence to which her talents justly entitle her. While she continues Miss O'Neill, and an interesting unprotected female, she will find that patronage which generosity and every better bias of public regard will continue undiminished to extend to her, or, in the words of the Duenna,

> "In all the ag'd
> A friend she'll meet,
> And brothers in the young."

But the moment she places herself under the protection of a husband, such is the whim of fashion, and the caprice of taste, the charm is over; the spell that bound prepossession to her merits is broken, and she *sinks* into a *wife*. This has been verified in a number of instances. Mrs. Siddons

began as a wife, and in that character was only known to the public; but even *she* had long to climb the boards. Mrs. Crawford began as Mrs. Barry, the wife of a favourite and first-rate actor, and under his wing, and with the aid of his reputation, came forward. Miss Duncan appeared at first with every advantage, but she sunk in Mrs. Davidson. The same may be said of many others. We do not mean to say by this, that Miss O'Neill should continue beyond a reasonable time in a state of *single blessedness*, but till she has amply fixed her reputation, and got hold of public opinion, which cannot be shaken, it is the advice of friendship, not to hazard the change of her name. When independent by her exertions, she can then command where she might at present lose.

It is to be regretted that this lady's health is delicate, and that her public exertions are often too great for her highly sensible frame. The public must feel a warm interest in whatever concerns her. She is frequently subjected to severe headaches, which render her incapable of appearing, for she is above the finesse of inferior performers, to disappoint an audience by design, or, for the sake of enhancing their supposed merits. By her

engagement with Mr. Harris, her salary is fixed only at £25 per week; but so overflowing has the treasury of Covent Garden been by her labours of last season, and it is no less so of this, that the manager, as a mark of his high esteem, presented her with jewels to the extent of £300; a gift equally creditable to himself as to the deserving character on whom they were conferred. In her summer excursions, we may add, she has met with an ample reward for her exertions, and thus made up for her contracted engagement; for from her appearance at the different provincial theatres, she has acquired a handsome sum, not less than £6000. For the convenience of travelling, not with the view of ostentation, she first set up her own carriage, and the regular manner of her life, and her having no fashionable extravagancies, the common bane of public characters in her line, enables her to live in a genteel and elegant manner.

The public approbation was sufficiently shewn at her last benefit, which we understand produced her no less than £1100.

To conclude, this lady promises to continue, for years, a deserved favourite of the town, in giving a just and improving picture of those transcendent

female characters which the hand of a Shakspeare, an Otway, and a Rowe, so happily drew; and while she pleases every eye and touches every heart, the approbation of her public merit extends equally, a rare instance, to her private virtues.

It would be improper to omit here, that, much to the credit of both parties, no actress ever received such a marked attention from Mrs. Siddons as Miss O'Neill. Above the little jealousy which too often actuates female minds, Mrs. Siddons not only acknowledged, in the most candid and impartial manner, her rising merit, but wished to commence with her that intimacy and friendly intercourse which shewed she considered her as her successor on the stage. Circumstances such as these deserve to be recorded, for though the line of acting the same characters varies much with these two celebrated women, yet, in pre-eminent excellence of representation, they stand both unrivalled, and though perhaps we may see their like again, yet it is greatly to be doubted, " taking them for all in all," if we shall ever see their superior.

THE END.

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